

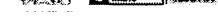
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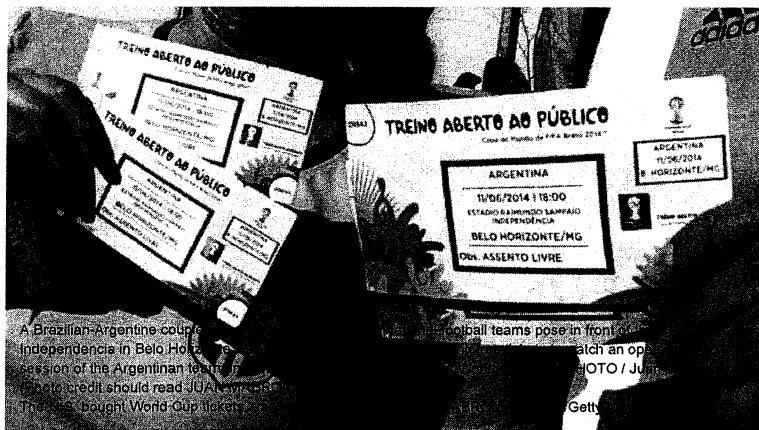
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U.S. Fans Bought a Ton of World Cup Tickets

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Filed Under: united states, US soccer, World Cup



A Brazilian-Argentine couple pose with their World Cup tickets in front of the stadium in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, June 17, 2014. The couple, from Chicago, are attending the World Cup. (AP Photo/Julio Cortez)

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Surprised the United States is the world's second-largest market for World Cup tickets, behind only host Brazil? Experts say you shouldn't be.

FIFA, soccer's global governing body, says about 200,000 tickets were sold in the United States, many through an online lottery months ago.



Insurance agent Zach Rambach of Springfield, Illinois, and five buddies spent about \$5,000 each on their "bucket list" trip to the tournament. They'll see four games, including U.S. vs. Germany on Thursday.

"You can't believe this. To go to the mecca of soccer, Brazil, just the excitement, the atmosphere and how unbelievably excited they are about their team," Rambach, 31, said. "I would have paid triple for it, I really would have."

Excuse Note to Get Out of Work to Watch World Cup

FIFA reported about 20,000 American fans attended the country's opening game against Ghana, or about half the crowd. Nishant Tella, a vice president at the New York City investment bank Inner Circle Sports, was among them.

"The fervor was there, everyone was fired up," said Tella, 31.

Here are some factors that make the U.S. a primary market for soccer's biggest event:

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PEOPLE AND MONEY, AND LOTS OF BOTH:

The U.S. is the world's third-largest country by population, with more than 318.9 million residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That dwarfs many of the world's soccer powers. If only 10 percent of Americans follow soccer — roughly 30 million people — that's three times the population of a soccer hotbed such as Belgium (population 10.5 million). The United Kingdom, the sport's birthplace, has a population of about 63.7 million, about a fifth of the size of the U.S.

The United States also is among the world's most affluent countries. Only a handful have higher per capita incomes, according to The World Bank, and they tend to be small countries like Kuwait, Australia, Switzerland and Sweden.

The combination of size and money is "the primary factor" behind the sales, according to Laurence DeGaris, an associate professor of marketing at the University of Indianapolis who regularly works in sports business.

POPULARITY RISING:

More than 24 million people in the U.S. watched the 2010 World Cup final — that's 10 million more than the World Series averaged per game last fall and triple the best-ever audience for the Stanley Cup final.

While it's tough to say exactly how popular soccer is as a spectator sport, television viewership suggests World Cup interest isn't something entirely new.

About 24.7 million people in the U.S. watched the home team play Portugal last Sunday, according to the Nielsen company. Four years ago, almost as many, 24.3 million, watched the World Cup final when no American was involved.

Neither figure can touch the Super Bowl, which drew 111.5 million viewers this year. But both are well beyond the 14.9 million last year's Fall Classic averaged per game and the best-ever 8.16 million who watched the 2013 Stanley Cup final.

NOT ALL STARS AND STRIPES

Ticket brokers and other experts believe most tickets bought in the United States were bought by fans of the U.S. team. But there's no doubt a substantial number of other teams' fans who live in the U.S. bought tickets, too.

Mexico fans from the United States in particular have been reported in significant numbers at that team's World Cup games. They regularly fill stadiums in the United States where the Mexican team plays many of its exhibition games, including a series of World Cup tuneups.

About 53 million people in the United States are Hispanic, according to the Census Bureau. And 65 percent of them are of Mexican origin, roughly 34.5 million people.

Smaller numbers of Americans whose ancestors emigrated from Italy, Portugal and other World Cup-featured countries cling loyally to those teams, too.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE BROKERS?

American sports fans accustomed to buying from secondary-market sellers such as Stubhub might wonder how many tickets purchased in the U.S. wound up selling on such sites.

Not many, it appears.

Stubhub says it has sold very few World Cup tickets. Ticketmaster says it isn't involved at all.

The companies FIFA works with directly to sell its tickets didn't return calls seeking comment this week. But the CEO of one smaller ticket broker, TiqIQ, said the secondary market for World Cup tickets is "relatively small compared to what you would see for other events."

TiqIQ's Jesse Lawrence estimated only about 50 seats were available for Thursday's U.S.-Germany game about 48 hours before kickoff.

"Like a Yankees game, there could be 5,000 seats available the day of the game," he said. "The vast majority of the people who wanted to go just got a ticket from FIFA, just through the online sale."

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